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Empire's End in Southeast Asia

Virginia Thompson

Richard Adloff

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The Authors

VIRGINIA THOMPSON and her husband, RICHARD ADLOFF, made a study tour of Southeast Asia in 1946-47 under the auspices of the American Institute of Pacific Relations and the Southeast Asia Institute. Articles by them, individually or jointly, have appeared in *Far Eastern Survey*, *Pacific Affairs* and other periodicals. Their report on nationalist and radical movements in Southeast Asia is to be published next spring by William Sloane Associates. Dr. Thompson is also the author of *French Indochina* (1937), *Thailand: The New Siam* (1941), *Postmortem on Malaya* (1943) and *Labor Problems in Southeast Asia* (1947).

BLAIR BOLLES, director of the Foreign Policy Association's Washington bureau, is author of "Who Makes Our Foreign Policy," No. 62 in the *Headline Series*.

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Empire's End In Southeast Asia

*by Virginia Thompson
and Richard Adloff*

1. Revolt in Paradise

BEFORE WORLD WAR II most Americans knew little of Southeast Asia beyond a fragment of geography, an image from a travelogue or a smattering of knowledge about the rubber, quinine and tin that were among this region's exports. It was an area of the world which rarely made headlines and which came to be associated vaguely in our minds with legendary South Sea paradises.

Shattering this idyllic ignorance, the Japanese conquest of Southeast Asia gave Java, Burma, Indochina, Singapore and other points on the map new importance in the strategy of a global war. And if this involved the extensive use of an atlas, it was nothing to what post-war developments required of Americans interested in keeping informed on international issues of the day. Independence movements in Burma, Indonesia and Indochina and civil strife in Malaya called for an understanding of popular aspirations which we hardly knew existed.

It was far easier for us to view with sympathy and comprehension a few of the post-war problems faced by the three colonial powers in Southeast Asia, Britain, France and the Netherlands. They were closer to us in many ways—as wartime allies in Europe and as democratic countries sharing a common Western political and cultural heritage. That they were also holders

of overseas empires presented a dilemma to American minds educated in a tradition of anti-colonialism.

Although there was nothing new about this dilemma, the struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union has made it urgent that we have a foreign policy, wise and enlightened if possible, for every part of the world in order to avoid losing a battle or a position in the all-pervading cold war. And Southeast Asia has become an even more crucial area as Chinese Communists approach its northern borders. To discover a wise and enlightened foreign policy toward this region in these circumstances calls for clear thought based on sound information not only on the part of the State Department's policy-makers but also on the part of the American public, the final arbiter of government actions at home and abroad.

Who, What and Where

Obviously, as far as Southeast Asia is concerned, we need to learn a great deal. While we may have a rough, war-induced knowledge of its geography, the current independence movements—their historical, economic, political and social backgrounds—have caught us flat-footed. Who are these people, how do they live, what do they want? And, if they achieve independence, what will their future be in relation to the peace and security of the world? Will they be potential enemies or potential allies of the West? Or will they be able to maintain neutrality in the contest between the two great power blocs even though their greatest need is for capital and technical assistance from the West? Simple as these questions may sound, their answers are not easily discerned.

Southeast Asia—a loosely defined area—refers here to the five countries of Indonesia, Thailand, Indochina, Malaya and Burma. The last four lie within the peninsula that forms the southeastern extremity of continental Asia, and the first-named, Indonesia, is an adjacent chain of islands scattered across an area wider than the United States.

FOCUS ON SOUTHEAST ASIA



LAND AND PEOPLE

SOUTHEAST ASIA

AREA

UNITED STATES

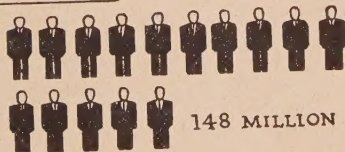
1,526,000
square miles

3,000,000
square miles

POPULATION



140 MILLION



148 MILLION

GRAPHIC ASSOCIATES

Southeast Asia's total population is thought to be almost as large as that of the United States—approximately 140 million—and is very uneven in its distribution as well as in its political and economic development. By and large, the area is underpopulated and rich in resources, producing more than enough food for its own needs and such raw materials and semi-processed goods as tin, rubber, oil, quinine, kapok and copra. Except in two densely populated regions—Java and parts of northern Indochina—there is no extensive economic misery, even though, by Occidental standards, the population as a whole has a very low standard of living. Although much of the uninhabited land is mountainous and jungle-covered, the latent wealth of Southeast Asia has for centuries brought thousands of immigrants from the nearby human reservoirs of China and India, where millions live under the constant threat of starvation.

Similarly, Europeans have been attracted in recent times by Southeast Asia's accessible and strategic position astride the crossroads between China and India and by its great natural resources. First they came as missionaries, traders and explorers, later as investors and rulers, and from the beginning only rarely as settlers. Except in Thailand, the native princes and chieftains were gradually replaced by Europeans or were closely controlled by them. The remnants of the local aristocracy and intelligentsia were either by-passed or transformed into a bureaucracy. A small intermediary class developed, mainly among those Chinese and Indian immigrants who became prosperous by serving as middlemen between the Western rulers and the native peoples. A cheap and abundant labor force was furnished by successive waves of such immigrants, who remained coolies until they were able to rise in the economic scale.

Most of the indigenous population were untouched by this change. They continued to live as peasants or fishermen, submitting passively to the arbitrary actions of their political and economic overlords. Thailand, thanks to its geographical location between the rival empires of France in Indochina and

Great Britain in Burma and Malaya and also to the ability of some of its kings, remained a politically sovereign state. But economically it followed a pattern similar to that of its neighbors and became dependent on world markets as an exporter of raw materials and an importer of manufactured goods.

Stamp of the Foreigner

Culturally, also, Southeast Asia bears a heavy foreign imprint. The region has absorbed the religions and social systems of Asia, while its contemporary political ideas and economic structure are largely imports from the West. The Malay peoples of Indonesia and Malaya were converted to Islam centuries ago by Arab traders, and the more northerly Thai, Burmese and Indochinese were indoctrinated with two varieties of Buddhism, one of which came from India and Ceylon and the other from China.

Aside from the basic animism that persists everywhere, traces of indigenous cultures are few, found chiefly in remote regions. The genius of the Southeast Asians has lain mainly in their absorption and adaptation of alien cultural elements. The adaptive artistic abilities of the people are most clearly shown in poetry, drama, music and dance, while the great architectural monuments—such as those of Angkor in Cambodia and the Borobodur in Java—derive almost unchanged from the advanced cultures of conquering empires.

In the political and economic field, also, Southeast Asians have been largely imitative. The traditional empire of Annam, in what is now eastern Indochina, was a replica of that of ancient China, and the princelings of the more westerly countries modeled their courts and administration on those of India's rajahs and khans. In more recent times, the pattern of colonial rule has produced a basically European-type governmental structure, whether applied by Britain in Burma and Malaya, France in Indochina, or the Netherlands in Indonesia. Concurrently, such disruptive political concepts as nationalism, democracy and communism have been introduced as by-products of Western con-

tacts, and in the inter-war period they took root so firmly as to foreshadow the destruction of colonial rule.

Japan's occupation of Southeast Asia during the Pacific war failed in so far as it sought to substitute one imperialism for another, but it was successful in stimulating Asian nationalist movements and Asian self-confidence. Militarily the white man's empire was swiftly defeated by an Asian power; psychologically it had already long been undermined by the contagion of the West's own revolutionary thinking.

2. Indonesia: A New Nation

BY FAR THE MOST important of the Southeast Asian countries emerging from colonial status into nationhood is Indonesia. An archipelago stretching nearly 4,000 miles or one-seventh of the way around the earth and having some 750,000 square miles of land area, it contains a population of 75 million. Java alone, with the same area as New York State, holds at least 50 million people, or nearly 1,000 per square mile, which gives it one of the densest populations in the world. Long rich in fable, the Indies are also, by modern standards, rich in resources. In pre-war years they produced 40 per cent of the world's rubber, 20 per cent of its tin, 77 per cent of its kapok, 91 per cent of its quinine and large shares of other important materials.

300 Years of Dutch Rule

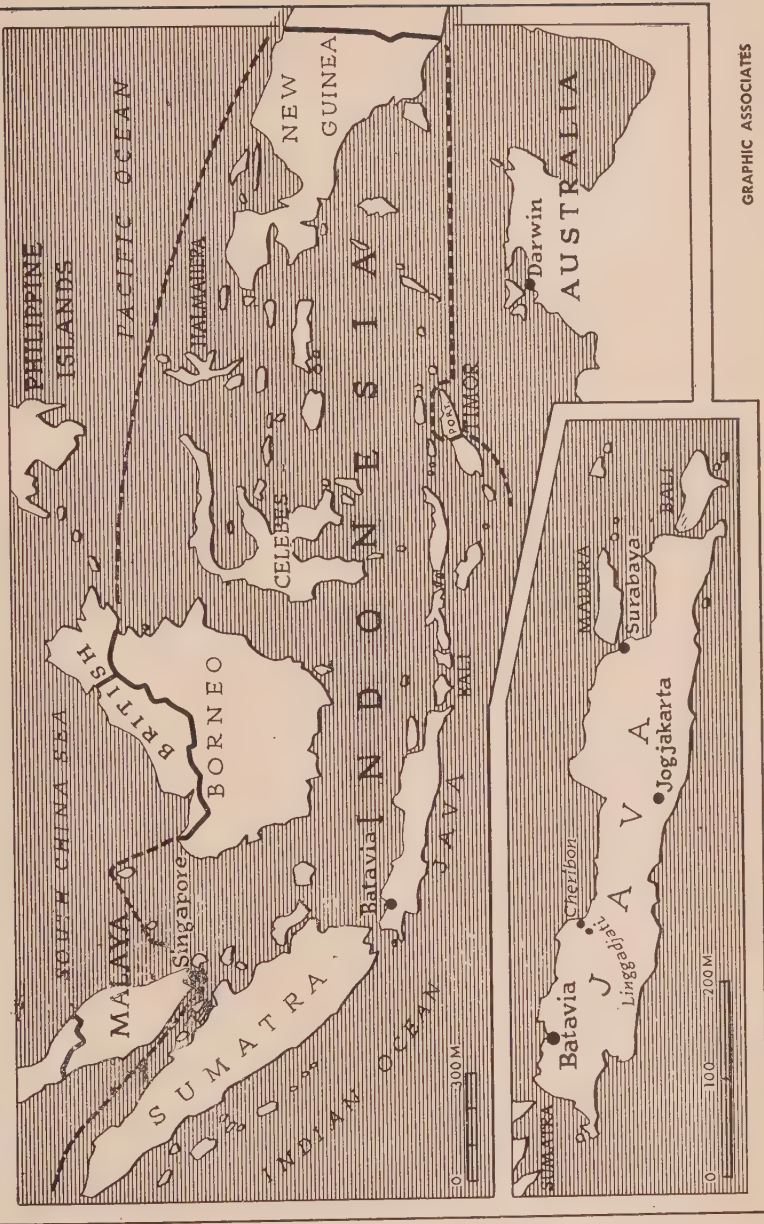
The Dutch who ruled the East Indies for 300 years had gained a reputation for model colonial administration. Therefore, it was news to many Occidentals that the question of Indonesian independence was a burning issue in the post-war era. The rapidity with which Indonesia became the focus of international attention was likewise phenomenal. At the first United Nations meeting in London in January 1946, the Ukraine raised in the Security Council the question of the British occupation of Java—British forces, and only a few Dutch, had moved in after the Japanese defeat. It was already apparent that great-power interests including those of the United States were becoming involved in the changes taking place in Southeast Asia.

Surprising though the strength of the Indonesian independence movement may have been to the outside world, various nationalist groups in the East Indies had been developing since as early as 1905. Some of these were based on religion—the population of the archipelago is predominantly Moslem—and others on Marxism. On the eve of World War II these groups came together in an organization known as *Gaboengan Partai Indonesia* (GAPI) or Federation of Nationalist Parties. However, nationalists remained divided on the crucial question of whether cooperation with, or violent opposition to, the imperial power was the better method of winning the national independence which they all wanted. This difference persisted throughout the Japanese occupation and has continued to color Indonesia's post-war alignments.

Despite the fact that the Dutch had brought Western technology and capital to the Indies, official Dutch policy in pre-war years was paternalistic. It sought to maintain traditional Indonesian society, religions and customary law, largely by means of indirect rule through the hereditary aristocracy. The Dutch economic and health services were outstanding, but Western-type education was introduced only sparingly, and any signs of nationalist unrest brought quick suppression.

Western ideas infiltrated mainly in the wake of economic penetration. Not only did a small intellectual class receive European education, but the traditional life of the villages was changing with every decade. Soetan Sjahrir, a nationalist educated in the Netherlands who was imprisoned after his return to the Indies, gives a glimpse of these changes in his autobiography, *Out of Exile*. Writing in 1937 of the amount of Westernization which had taken place in the previous fifteen years, he noted: "Women [of Moslem Indonesia] who have themselves spent most of their lives in their homes without being seen by any strange male eyes seem to accustom themselves with remarkable ease to the habits of their bobbed-haired daughters who dance, bicycle and have boy friends."

INDONESIA

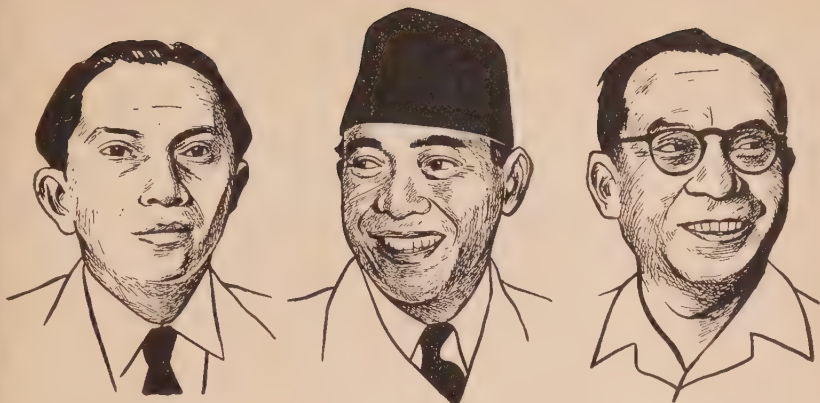


Impact of Japan

Therefore, it was not only the Japanese occupation, which began in March 1942, that brought about the Indonesian revolt—as was alleged by the Dutch. The effect of the occupation was to accentuate existing trends, intensifying both directly and indirectly the nationalism already in existence. Indonesian hatred of imperialism was deepened by Japan's ruthless exploitation, and Japanese appeals for Asian solidarity in the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere met with almost no response.

At the same time, the Japanese gave direct impetus to nationalist feeling by stressing Indonesia's culture and language in hopes of lessening the lure of Western civilization. They provided the Indonesians with arms and military training to defend the islands against a possible Allied invasion. Finally, to give the Indonesians a stake in Japan's hoped-for victory, a promise of independence was made late in 1944, and control of internal administration was turned over increasingly to Indonesians as military reverses drained Japanese energies throughout South-east Asia. The training, experience and self-reliance gained in this way stood the Indonesians in good stead when the pre-war leaders, Soekarno and Mohammed Hatta, proclaimed the Republic two days after the Japanese surrender and became its first president and vice-president.

Between the Japanese surrender and the arrival of the first British troops, the Indonesians had six weeks in which to set up an independent government, and they lost no time in doing so. A provisional constitution, bearing similarities to the American Constitution, was adopted, a national flag was flown from public buildings, and a national motto—*Merdeka* (Freedom)—was on every tongue. A provisional parliament, *Komite Nasional Indonesia Poesat* (KNIP), was chosen by President Soekarno from the leaders of all shades of nationalist opinion and all religious and minority groups. Sjahrir became the leader of the KNIP working committee and, soon after, the Republic's first



Sjahrir

Soekarno

Hatta

premier. Thus the three leaders who are still dominant in the movement assumed high office in the Republic—Soekarno, whose personal magnetism gives him a mass following, Hatta, the professorial administrator, and Sjahrir, the Westernized intellectual.

When the British forces arrived, they were totally unprepared either militarily or politically to cope with this administration which was functioning not only in Java but also in Sumatra, the second largest of the islands. The few Dutchmen who came in with the British received a rude shock from the fierce Indonesian opposition to their return, and they refused to deal with the Republic on the ground that its two most conspicuous leaders, Soekarno and Hatta, had collaborated with the Japanese.

The British were able to establish bridgeheads in only eight of the big towns of Java and Sumatra. Through these they allowed an increasing flow of Dutch administrators and troops to pass into the islands. The British did not wish to alienate their wartime allies, the Dutch—who were also their fellow colonialists in Southeast Asia—and they were concerned with safeguarding the route to Australia as well as their investments, second to those of the Dutch, in Indonesia. But at the same time they had appraised more realistically the strength of Indonesian nationalism, and they insisted that the Dutch negotiate

with Sjahrir, who had led resistance against the Japanese and therefore did not have the collaborationist taint to which the Dutch objected.

Dutch Efforts to Regain Control

This was the beginning of the long struggle to hammer out a peaceful settlement between the Netherlands, a nation of no more than 8 million people, and its teeming colony. The Dutch, themselves victims of an Axis invasion, were attempting to achieve economic recovery along with the rest of Western Europe. Their interests in Indonesia, the source of about 17 per cent of the Netherlands' national income in pre-war years, were stakes worth fighting for. They tried alternately to reestablish their sovereignty through negotiation and by the use of military force. When the restoration of colonial rule no longer appeared possible, other tactics were employed—economic pressure and widening of internal cleavages, particularly between the Javanese and other ethnic groups.

These internal cleavages are worth a word of explanation. They stem from the uneven political, economic and cultural development of the various peoples of the islands. They also result from the diversity of pre-war Dutch administration and the isolation of the islands from each other and from foreign contacts. Dutch efforts since 1945 to divide and rule have been aided, moreover, by the preoccupation of Republican leaders with winning foreign support to the neglect of internal unification. Thus, although the Indonesians have found a common bond in their hostility to the return of Dutch colonial rule, this bond has not been strong enough to overcome entirely the resentment by other islanders of Java's assumption of leadership, fear of the overwhelming Moslem majority on the part of those of non-Islamic faiths and, above all, the conflicting ideologies of various groups of nationalists.

As British troops were gradually withdrawn during 1946, the reaching of an agreement between the Netherlands and the Re-

public became imperative. After long negotiations between the Dutch Acting Governor General, Hubertus J. Van Mook, and Indonesian Premier Sjahrir, an agreement was finally initialled at Linggadjati, in central Java, on November 15, 1946. Both men were under great pressure from extremists among their own compatriots, and the Linggadjati compromise represented a triumph for their moderate views.

By its terms the *de facto* authority of the Republic in Java, Sumatra and Madura (just north of Java) was recognized. A Netherlands-Indonesian Union was to be set up by January 1, 1949 in which a federated United States of Indonesia would be an equal partner with the Netherlands Kingdom under the sovereignty of the Dutch crown. Pre-war foreign enterprises were either to be restored to their owners or to be paid for in cases where they were taken over by the Indonesians in the public interest. Finally a truce was to precede the gradual withdrawal of Dutch and Indonesian troops to their respective areas of control. This agreement was to be ratified by both the Dutch and Indonesian parliaments.

No sooner was this proposed settlement made public than its existence was threatened by extremists on both sides. In the Netherlands the Catholic-Labor government which sponsored the agreement was attacked by the colonial diehards who resented Holland's loss of prestige, by the military who were itching for a solution by force of arms, and by those Dutch investors who feared that the agreement would entail loss of the income they had received in pre-war years. On the Indonesian side the ultra-nationalist groups refused any compromise with the Dutch. The Communists (both Stalinist and Trotzkyite)—who were then supporting the government—complained of the agreement's economic concessions. And the hot-headed military youth corps were as eager for a trial of armed strength as were the Dutch army leaders.

The pressure of this opposition, as well as the difficult course of the negotiations, had already caused a gradual alteration of

the Republic's constitutional structure and of the relative strength of the political parties represented in KNIP (parliament). Because the Dutch, in late 1945, were willing to negotiate with Sjahrir but not with President Soekarno, the executive-legislative relationship, originally modeled on that of the United States, had given way to a parliamentary system of the West-European type, in which Premier Sjahrir became responsible to the government-appointed KNIP. Then, after the extreme Left had tried in June 1946 to oust Sjahrir by force (he was actually kidnapped), the President had reassumed his constitutional prerogatives. And he had again invoked them in December 1946 so as to pack the KNIP with party representatives who would vote for the Linggadjati agreement. In so doing he increased the parliamentary strength of the Left-wing bloc at the expense of the Rightists—a move which inadvertently also strengthened the hand of the Indonesian Communists.

The First 'Police' Action

The series of incidents that led up to the first Dutch "police" action, in July 1947, had begun even before the signing of the Linggadjati agreement. The Dutch, as early as July 1946, had started a campaign aimed at splintering support for the Republic by setting up a number of states which were to come into the United States of Indonesia. The first move of this nature involved territories on the eastern periphery of the Republic—the Lesser Sundas and Moluccas. But as time passed these new "states" not only threatened to outweigh the Republic's voice in the proposed federation but they infringed on areas in which support for the Republic seemed to be strong. Moreover, in January 1947 the Dutch imposed stringent export-import regulations which had the effect of throwing an economic blockade around the Republican territory.

Provocative incidents were also contributed by the Indonesians: the Republic's envoys established diplomatic relations with friendly foreign countries, and a lively "smuggling" trade

was maintained with Malayan ports in defiance of the Dutch blockade. And concurrently, each side charged the other with violations of the military truce.

The seeming failure of Van Mook's policy of negotiation, together with the declining economic situation both in the Netherlands and in the Dutch-held areas of Indonesia, led to the first all-out Dutch military attack on the Republic—the so-called police action of July 1947. Within a few weeks the Republic lost so much territory that its economic position, favorable until then, was reversed, and public confidence in the government's ability to win independence by diplomacy was seriously weakened.

Indonesia in the UN

As early as January 1946, as already mentioned, the Indonesia question had become entangled in the world struggle between the Western and Soviet blocs. Later, India and Australia, for different reasons, joined the Soviet Union's delegates in supporting the Republic. But the attitude of the United States and China in the UN remained so noncommittal as to seem to condone Dutch aggression and to underwrite colonialism in Southeast Asia generally.

In October 1947, the UN indeed sent to Indonesia a Commission of Good Offices, which managed to bring about a precarious cease-fire and the revival of negotiations between the Dutch and the Republic. But the resultant Renville Agreement, signed in January 1948, confirmed even if temporarily the Republic's territorial losses and failed either to lift the Dutch blockade or to restrain the Dutch from pursuing their program of setting up "state" after "state" at the expense of Republican territory. More serious, the disappointing outcome of UN intervention sowed further dissension in the Republican camp and, along with the misery caused by the blockade, paved the way for an attempt of the extreme Indonesian Left to seize power through revolt in September 1948. This revolt was firmly sup-

pressed by the Republican government. Thousands of persons implicated in the Communist movement were promptly jailed, and a number of prominent leaders were executed.

Although the Communist revolt failed to enlist enough popular support to insure its success, it did have the result of strengthening United States and international support of the Republic's cause, but at the same time it weakened still further the internal position of the middle-of-the-road Republican government.

Using as an excuse the "disorders" that grew out of the Communist revolt and mindful of the success of their first military action, the Dutch again resorted to force in December 1948. They swiftly captured the main cities and towns of the Republic, as well as many of its leaders, and presented the world with a *fait accompli*. Some Republican officials who had been beyond the reach of the Dutch offensive immediately set up an emergency government in a remote part of Sumatra, and guerrilla warfare against the Dutch was intensified. But the Security Council's resolutions were watered down to little more than reproaches to the Dutch and vague suggestions that a truce be reestablished, and even the conference called by India's Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, in January to enlist Asian opposition to the Netherlands action failed to take the strong stand that had been hoped for by the Republic and its sympathizers.

Conference at The Hague

Despite the half-hearted international pressure for a negotiated peace in Indonesia, however, the unforeseen wave of world censure of the events of December 1948—not to mention the wide-spread Indonesian guerrilla operations in Java and Sumatra—brought forth some Dutch gestures toward conciliation during 1949. Negotiations between Netherlands officials and the interned Republican leaders, under UN sponsorship, finally resulted in an agreement in May 1949. Under its terms the Republican government was soon afterwards reestablished within the limits of the Sultanate of Jogjakarta in central Java, and the

Republic participated, along with the Federated Indonesian states and the Netherlands, in a round-table conference which convened at The Hague in August 1949.

Two months' work by this conference culminated with the signing of two important documents—a provisional constitution for the new Republic of United Indonesia on October 29 and an agreement on November 2 transferring sovereignty to the new state. Under the terms of the latter, sovereignty over the archipelago—except for New Guinea, whose status was to be decided a year later—was to pass to the Indonesians in late December, although ultimate legal sovereignty over the Netherlands-Indonesian Union remains with the crown of the Netherlands.

Under the new administrative set-up, the former Republic of Indonesia will control one-third of the seats in the bicameral constituent assembly which is to be created. This represents a concession to the Republic's long-standing claim for a paramount position in the new federation.

Thus the outcome of the future elections and the type of permanent constitution eventually decided upon will help shape Indonesia's future. But more important still will be the spirit in which both the Dutch and Indonesians carry out the provisions of The Hague agreements.

3. Thailand: An Old Kingdom

SIAM, AFTER SHIFTING back and forth several times in recent years, now officially calls itself Thailand, meaning "land of the free," a reminder to the rest of the world that it alone of the nations of Southeast Asia has remained independent through modern history. Although a Japanese occupation marred this enviable record, foreign rule ended with Tokyo's defeat, and Thai sovereignty is again undisputed.

Today, Thailand's middle name, if it had one, would be rice. Although other nations grow greater amounts and Burma in pre-war years was a larger exporter, Thailand's present rice surplus in the hungry post-war world has been an important factor in politics as well as the main source of livelihood for the country's 17.2 million people.

With two great advantages—historic independence and a food surplus—Thailand might be considered in a position of potential leadership for a region where other nations are still struggling for freedom and where other peoples are short of both food and the means to earn foreign exchange. But Thailand has not proved to be a leader in Southeast Asia nor has it dealt effectively with its own economic and political problems.

The method by which the Thai have maintained their independence in both the past and the present and their poor showing as a "democratic" self-governing state have only served to cast them in a negative role in the current dynamics of Southeast Asia. In the past, this aloofness could be explained by the region's natural geographic barriers, which kept Southeast Asians

THE FOUR MAINLAND COUNTRIES



mutually isolated and ignorant, and by the differing cultures and political regimes in adjacent colonial countries. With almost two centuries of practice, Thai statesmen have become astute at maintaining their country's independence and unity by playing off the two greatest powers in Southeast Asia against each other—first Britain and France, then Britain and Japan, and now Britain and the United States. Considering the current rise of India and Communist China in the Asian power position, a revision of Thai foreign policy is now overdue.

Pridi and Pibul

Centuries-long independence has produced a certain stability in Thailand but has not brought democracy. Until 1932 Siam was ruled by one of the last surviving absolute monarchies in the world. In that year a *coup d'état* staged by a group of civilian liberals and army officers replaced this absolute monarchy with a constitutional one. This change was not accompanied by a corresponding economic revolution or mass movement nor has it ever been fully accepted in Thailand. Royalist conservatives led by Prince Boveradej vainly attempted to overthrow the constitutional regime in 1933, and even today personal intrigues play an important part in Thai politics.

Two rival figures took the Thai stage in the pre-war decade and have continued their contest during and after the war. One is Pridi Phanomyong, the civilian leader of the 1932 coup. (In pre-war days Pridi was known by his title, Luang Pradit Manudharm.) The other is Pibul Songgram, an army officer. (Thai phonetics are tricky—Pibul is pronounced Pee-boon.) Pibul, after periodic attempts to wrest control from Pridi's liberal group, succeeded in December 1938 and became premier.

The Japanese invaders, installed in neighboring Indochina before Pearl Harbor, arrived on Pibul's doorstep the same day they attacked the Allies. Pibul's government offered only token resistance and soon declared war on the United States and Britain. It also intensified discriminatory measures against the resi-

dent Chinese minority (numbering more than 2 million under Chinese law but only half a million by the Thai legal definition of nationality) and took over territory from Indochina, Malaya and Burma. An underground resistance movement, however, called the Free Thai, developed under Pridi's leadership.

After the Japanese surrender Thailand spent eighteen months squaring itself with the victorious powers in order to escape being treated as an Axis satellite. A Pridi-backed government had replaced Pibul's more than a year before the Japanese surrendered. The Free Thais' war record, Thailand's conciliatory attitude and, above all, the world's great need for the rice which Thailand could supply put the Western powers in a forgiving mood. Economic concessions were made to Britain, and the border provinces annexed from Malaya and Burma were given back immediately. Later and much more reluctantly, the Indochinese territory taken from Vichy France with Japanese connivance was restored. Finally, two steps were taken which made diplomatic history for Thailand. To propitiate China, which had long resented Thai discrimination against the domiciled Chinese, a Thai-Chinese treaty of friendship was signed in January 1946, establishing diplomatic relations between the two coun-



Pridi



Pibul

tries for the first time in their existence. Then the Thai, after repealing their internal ban on communism, asked the Soviet Union for the restoration of diplomatic relations which had been broken off after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The Thai had now paid the price for reinstatement to international good standing, and in December 1946 Thailand achieved its longed-for goal of admission to the UN.

Rice, Rackets and Regicide

Thus by the beginning of 1947 the country was free to turn from foreign affairs to the domestic scene. As a result of the war, its economy, especially the transportation system, had suffered; the area under rice cultivation had declined markedly; crime was rife, particularly in the rural areas; and the population in general was demoralized by the Japanese occupation. For only a few months after the war's end, food had remained abundant and cheap, although imported commodities such as clothing and medicine were still very expensive and scarce.

As world food shortages became increasingly acute, partly as the result of the war's devastation in the region's two other rice-surplus countries, Burma and Indochina, Thailand was able to use its rice exports as an effective bargaining counter. They served to build up treasury reserves of hard currency and to enlist both British and American aid in rebuilding the transportation system and rehabilitating other parts of the economy.

But this emphasis on rice also had its disadvantages. It accentuated Thailand's long-standing dependence on a single crop at the expense of its other exports of timber, tin and rubber. Furthermore, rice prices fixed under Anglo-Thai agreements, although progressively raised, proved low in relation to those on free markets. Consequently, at least as much rice was smuggled out of Thailand to the black markets of China and Malaya as was exported through legitimate channels. This contraband trade not only encouraged profiteering and created domestic shortages, but increased official corruption. The cost of living

spiralled upward, and for this state of affairs the government blamed the merchants for hoarding, the merchants blamed the government for unnecessary trade restrictions and for graft, and the public blamed both—chiefly the government—for weakness and corruption.

To this situation were added the rumors and unrest emanating from Thailand's royal tragedy. In June 1946 the youthful, Swiss-educated King Ananda—whose titles included Half Brother of the Sun and Keeper of the Twenty-four Golden Umbrellas—was found shot to death in his bedroom in the royal palace. Accident, suicide or regicide? The question has never been decisively answered.

Rumors were widespread in Bangkok that Pridi, the Free Thai leader and premier at the time, was personally implicated. His unfortunate reaction to such charges—including an increasingly arbitrary attitude towards the press—adversely affected public opinion. Moreover, the adoption of Thailand's second constitution in May 1946 had placed power so firmly in the hands of Pridi's Free Thai followers that there were no legal means of overcoming their control of both houses of Parliament until general elections could be held two years later. With their comparatively long—for Thailand—tenure of office, party discipline within the Free Thai ranks grew progressively weaker, while the forces opposing the Pridi-dominated government consolidated themselves. Thus the way was paved for a violent political upheaval.

This occurred in a *coup d'état* brought off in November 1947 by the combined action of conservative civilians and army officers. For five months thereafter the civilian element nominally controlled the government, although there were evidences of a widening rift between it and its military allies. Finally, in April 1948, the army ousted the government and reinstated as premier the wartime dictator, Pibul Songgram.

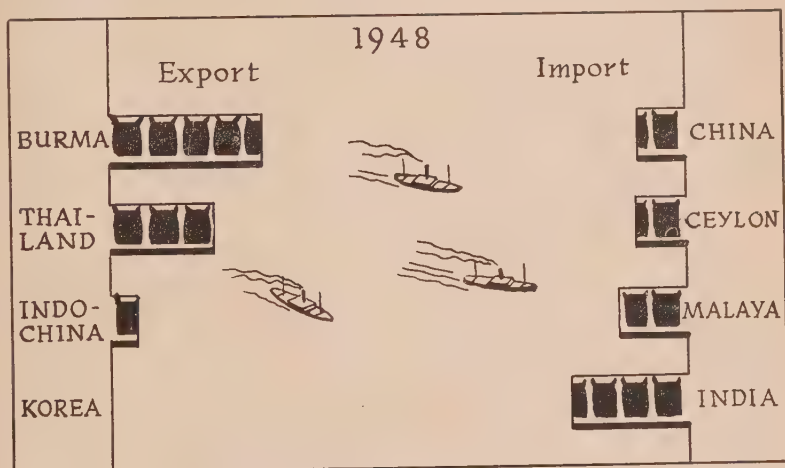
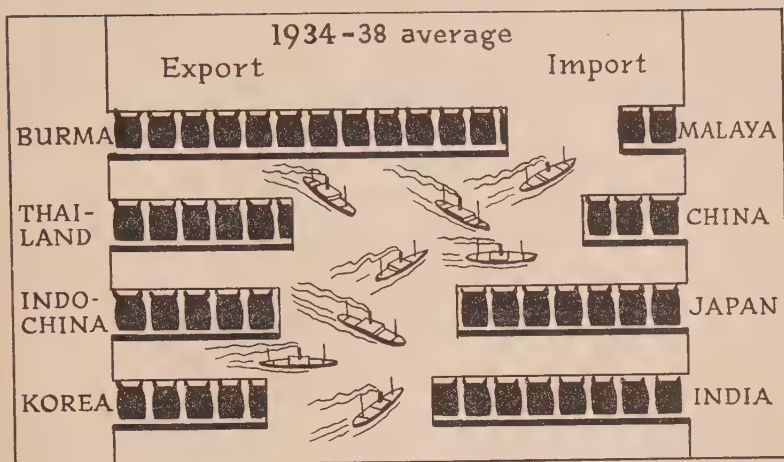
The return of Thailand's "strong man" to the helm of state was accepted passively by the Thai people, as have been all

other political changes in that country. To encourage their acquiescence in his rule, Pibul promised to check the prevalent corruption, lower the cost of living, keep the unpopular Chinese under control, and generally reestablish law and order. Although a few outstandingly venal officials were dismissed and rice smuggling and violent crime have fallen off considerably, corruption and racketeering are still rampant throughout the country. Rice exports have now climbed back almost to pre-war figures, and rubber has exceeded them. The sterling and dollars earned from these goods have enabled Thailand to make extensive purchases abroad of capital and consumer goods and to withdraw from circulation a considerable part of its inflated currency. And the cost of living has dropped since November 1947 by about a quarter.

But at the same time, teak and tin shipments are still far below pre-war exports of those commodities; the war-born industries have almost died out and with them the prospect for a more diversified economy. There is still a serious shortage, for commercial purposes, of hard currencies, which are swiftly and steadily rising in relation to the *baht*, Thailand's monetary unit. Furthermore, these developments have been accompanied by ever-tightening government controls and the progressive exclusion of the resident Chinese from certain occupations. Thailand's economy has certainly improved under the Pibul regime and has shown greater recovery since the war than that of any of its neighbors, but it has the ominous weakness of being now almost wholly dependent upon selling a large rice surplus at high prices in the world market.

The restoration of even such superficial economic stability has been largely instrumental in winning foreign recognition and active material support for Pibul's government. Great Britain and the United States were naturally reluctant to see Pibul, with his record of collaboration with the Japanese, restored to power. The violence with which he has since eliminated his political opponents—who have tried twice within the past year

ASIA'S RICE TRADE



 represents 250,000 tons of rice

GRAPHIC ASSOCIATES

to overthrow him—has hardly substantiated his self-proclaimed conversion to democracy. Yet Pibul can point to ever-larger rice exports, he has effectively courted the Western powers, and he has taken “drastic steps” to check Communist infiltration into Thailand. The fact that the last-mentioned measures amount to persecution of the Chinese and that he uses the “Communist

menace" as justification for imposing what is nothing short of a military dictatorship have not yet seriously diminished his usefulness in Western eyes as a bulwark against the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. However, the possibility cannot be discounted that Pibul's many domestic enemies may make common cause with the extreme Left, until now confined almost exclusively to a small element of the domiciled Chinese minority.

Thailand's stability depends primarily on a real solution of its two major internal problems—the position of the Chinese minority and the chronic intervention in politics of the military caste. If Thailand can deal with these problems successfully, then the traditional conservatism of its people—based on a surplus economy and the absence of any nationalist struggle for independence—may be able to withstand the revolutionary forces now surging through the rest of Southeast Asia.

4. Indochina: An East-West Riddle

THE POLITICAL DIVISION called French Indochina presents one of Southeast Asia's most complex problems. Indochinese history, ancient and modern, is complex. The structure of French pre-war colonial administration, the course of the Japanese occupation, the events of the Anglo-Chinese occupation and the nationalist struggle against renewed French rule are all full of complexities.

Moreover, the present situation in Indochina is important. It contributes to the downfall of French cabinets in Paris. It worries the State Department and the foreign ministers of the Western democracies. If the truth could be known, it may even worry the Kremlin.

If one single cause for this widespread concern over Indochina could be named, it would probably be the uncertainty as to the political complexion of Ho chi-Minh, the dominant figure in the independence movement. Ho was a Communist agent in pre-war years, Moscow-trained and an assistant to Borodin in the era when the Soviet Union sent advisers to Chiang Kai-shek in China. Does this mean that Ho's regime in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, as the independence organization calls itself, is Communist-dominated? If it is, will it give precedence to the aims of international communism or to the nationalism from which it derives its strength? Is Ho himself still a Communist? The answers to the first two questions at present can only be guesses. Even the answer to the third is in doubt—it is Ho's secret, and he refuses to divulge it.

As important as these questions are, now that the Chinese Communists are approaching the northern border of Indochina, they are not the only issues at stake. The whole story involves an area larger than Texas, half of it mountainous, inhabited by more than 25 million people. There are five subdivisions—Tonkin, Annam and Cochin-China, running from north to south on the South China Sea, and Laos and Cambodia, bordering on Thailand to the west. Like all Southeast Asian countries, Indochina has many ethnic groups, but the largest, the Annamese or Annamites (who now call themselves Vietnamese), constitute 70 per cent of the population and live not only in Annam but in Tonkin and Cochin-China. They are fighting strongly for independence, in contrast to the Cambodians and Laotians, who are offering only weak and fitful resistance to French control.

At no time in its history has Indochina possessed genuine unity, either cultural or political. Cambodia and Laos, the western section, are marked by Indian tradition. The three *Kys*—or provinces—of the east coastline are deeply influenced by the Chinese, who ruled them for a thousand years down to 931 A.D.

The French picked up these pieces one by one in the latter half of the nineteenth century, giving them a single coloring on the map but little else in integrating influence. The administration of this French “balcony on the Pacific” embraced a medley of different forms held together by a centralized government-general, closely controlled by Paris and staffed almost exclusively by French civil servants except in the lower posts. Cochin-China was an outright colony; Annam, Laos and Cambodia were protectorates, nominally under their traditional rulers; and Tonkin was a mixture of the two.

Economically the country was knit together by a common communications system and by federal technical services, but it was stratified by ethnic groups in the classic colonial pattern. Indochina’s few capitalistic enterprises were almost wholly French; its middlemen and mercantile community were largely

Chinese and its laboring class, both agricultural and industrial, was completely indigenous. French economic penetration was strongest in underpopulated Cochinchina, one of the greatest rice-exporting areas of the world and the site of a sizable French rubber-plantation industry. It was weakest in the three protectorates. Tonkin represented an intermediary ground, with special problems and promise. The dense population in the Red River delta of this province failed to produce enough rice for its own needs, and surplus labor from the delta tended to migrate to the plantations of the south or to the mining industries in Tonkin's own sparsely populated mountains. Tonkin's potentialities for industrialization and its strategic position on the Chinese border were considered important enough to justify the building of a good road and rail network, and for the same reason its towns were provided with numerous hospitals and educational institutions.

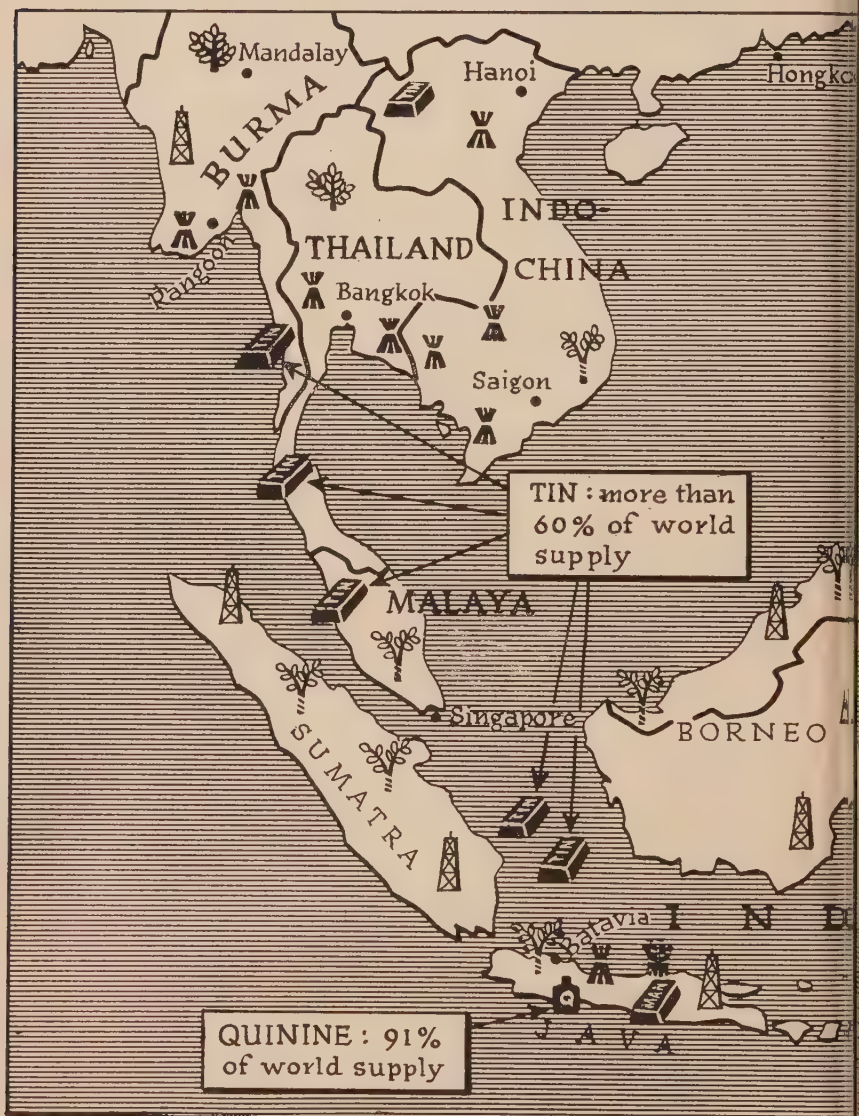
Throughout Indochina, French culture permeated the small educated class but scarcely touched the rest of the population. Not only was this penetration superficial but it failed to provide outlets for educated Indochinese commensurate with their industry and abilities, nor did it raise appreciably the standard of living of the people in general. Thus there were many sources of discontent with the French colonial regime.

The Japanese Came Early

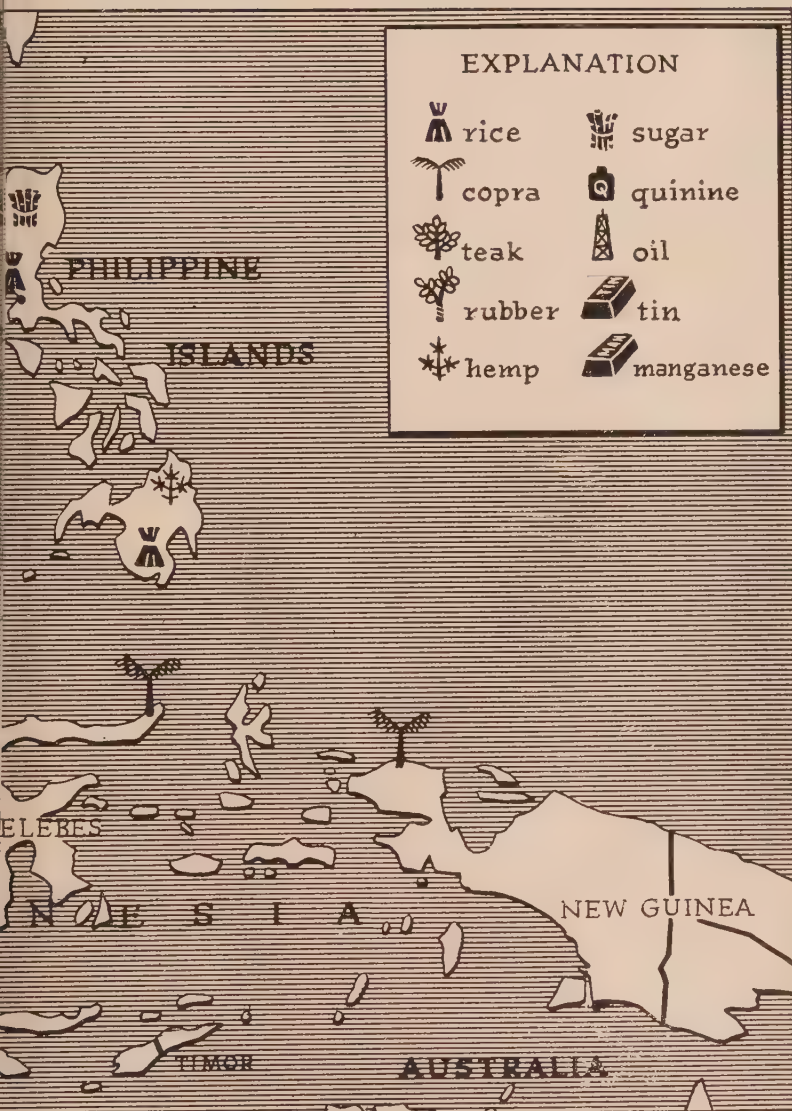
France's defeat in Europe in 1940 inevitably made Indochina the opening wedge for Japan's southward drive. Despite protests from the Allies, Japanese troops occupied key points throughout the country and were firmly installed by July 1941, six months before Pearl Harbor. As a reward for Vichy's lack of resistance, the Japanese left the French colonial administration in Indochina intact and gave the Annamite nationalists no material encouragement.

As the war progressed, however, and the prospects of an Allied victory became stronger, the new Asian masters found they no

SOUTHEAST ASIA'S RESOURCES



LIST FOR WORLD'S INDUSTRIES



GRAPHIC ASSOCIATES

longer had a docile French community with which to deal but one in which the Free French supporters of General de Gaulle were gaining strength. Though small and separate from the Annamite (or Vietnamese) anti-Japanese resistance groups, the Gaullist movement constituted an increasing threat to Japan's occupation, particularly after the Vichy regime was swept away by the Allied victories in Europe and collaboration with Axis powers became openly unpopular in the French homeland.

On March 9, 1945 the Japanese quickly and violently eliminated the Indochinese colonial administration they had condoned so long, replaced French officials with Japanese officers and sponsored declarations of independence by the Emperor of Annam and the Kings of Cambodia and Laos. This, however, effected no basic change, and the new native regimes collapsed immediately after the Japanese surrender.

The Republic and the Powers

Into this vacuum came three forces—the Vietnamese nationalists and the troops of two allied powers, Britain and China, who were sent into the country to accept the Japanese surrender. The nationalists were on the scene first and quickly set up the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The British and Chinese, neither of which had the forces nor incentives to try very hard, were unable to win control of all of Indochina, and the French, who have since tried very hard, have not been much more successful.

The Vietnam Republic received its leadership largely from among Vietnamese living in southern China, the main center of activity for Indochinese revolutionaries before and during the war years. Two main groups had been formed under the patronage of the Kuomintang, the Chinese Nationalist party. The first was the Dong Minh Hoi, which enjoyed Kuomintang preference and which included in its ranks Indochina's oldest nationalist organization—the one that had instigated a revolt at Yenbay (Tonkin) in 1930. The second was the Vietminh, headed by Ho

chi-Minh, the veteran Comintern agent and one of the outstanding personalities of Southeast Asia.

Rivalry between these two leagues broke out when they entered Tonkin after the Japanese defeat. It was the Vietminh that emerged on top, establishing the Republic at Hanoi in August 1945 and dominating the nationalist movement ever since by adroit diplomacy and by the liquidation of its political opponents. The Vietminh's preeminence, however, is not unchallenged. In Cochin-China there were, and still are, splits between Stalinist and Trotskyite Communists and hostility to the Republican government on the part of the Separatists, whose nationalism takes a regional form. In the same area there are two other anti-Vietminh groups—the politico-religious sects known as the Caodaists and the Hoa-Haoists. The Vietnamese differ as to the leadership and methods by which self-government is to be achieved, as well as in regard to the economic program which the country should follow. On the whole, however, the Vietminh derives considerable strength from the widespread desire for independence and for the unity of the Annamite countries—Tonkin, Annam and Cochin-China.

The British and Chinese occupation obscured for a time the irreconcilability—which later erupted so violently—of the viewpoints of France and the Vietnam Republic as to Indochina's future.

The British, who occupied the area south of the sixteenth parallel and who had no political and only a small economic stake in the country, were both ill-prepared and reluctant to deal with the unexpectedly complex political situation that greeted them upon their arrival at Saigon in September 1945. Rather than recognize the Vietnamese administration already functioning there, they chose to hand the headache over to the French, as soon as French military strength made this feasible. By early 1946, the British holding operation and disunity within the Vietnamese ranks had made it possible for the French to establish themselves in Cochin-China's main towns and to make

rapid headway in reasserting their influence in adjacent Cambodia and Laos.

On the other hand, the Chinese—who in the late fall of 1945 occupied the northern part of the country—had a direct interest in the political and economic future of Indochina and a long and influential acquaintance with Vietnamese nationalism. Although they would have preferred to have the Kuomintang's protégé, the Dong Minh Hoi, in control of the Republic, they recognized the Vietminh to be the stronger party of the two. The Chinese therefore contented themselves with getting the Vietminh to assign to the Dong Minh Hoi certain cabinet posts and a bloc of seats in the National Assembly "elected" in January 1946. But Chinese influence and interest soon waned. The Vietnamese, historically suspicious of their northern neighbor, were embittered by the Chinese policy of allowing the occupation troops to live freely off the land despite Tonkin's precarious economic situation. And China itself withdrew support for the Republic, as well as its troops from the country, after France had made important treaty concessions to the Chinese Nationalist government in February 1946.

By this time, then, only the two principals—France and the Republic—were left on the stage. As a result of the early British and Chinese withdrawal and the failure of Vietnamese appeals to the United Nations for support, Ho chi-Minh became convinced that he must negotiate with the French. For their part, the French were eager to reach a quick settlement with the Republic so that their troops could occupy Tonkin with a minimum of bloodshed. Hence, an agreement was reached on March 6, 1946. Its liberal terms included recognition of the Republic's internal sovereignty. Vietnamese concessions included acquiescence in membership of the Republic in an Indochinese Federation within the framework of the French Union. A referendum was to be held in Cochin-China to determine whether that area should become a separate state or a part of the Republic. Left for future settlement were the question of the

Republic's foreign relations and the details of a military truce.

Dispute with the French

Soon after the agreement of March 1946 was signed and throughout the various negotiations during the same year both in Indochina and France, it became clear that these three questions—the future of Cochin-China, Vietnam's foreign relations, and the implementation of the truce—were major stumbling blocks. The French set up an "Autonomous Republic of Cochin-China" in June 1946 before the promised referendum was held. This, plus French troop operations in southern Annam and a number of incidents in various parts of the country, produced tension. Finally fighting broke out at Hanoi in December 1946. Hostilities, guerrilla-style, soon spread through all the Annamite regions and have continued ever since against a background of steadily worsening economic conditions and French efforts to splinter nationalist support for the Republic. During this period French control in the Vietnamese lands has been confined to urban areas, military posts and some communication lines between them.

For almost two years France has sought some workable alternative to reopening negotiations with the Republic. In its most recent attempt it has turned to Bao Dai, the ex-emperor of Annam. Bao Dai, European-educated and youthful, had abdicated in 1946 in favor of the Republic and even entered the service of the Ho government as an adviser. However, he soon left Indochina for Hong Kong and later for France. His enemies call him a play boy—he frequents nightclubs and drives a racing car—but some sections of the French press present him as an enlightened and democratic figure.

In hopes of rallying those Annamites who, through political, economic or religious conservatism, fear the Communist or other leaders of the Republic, the French signed an agreement with Bao Dai in March 1949. Soon afterwards he returned to Indochina, once again as Emperor and also as head of a French-

sponsored provisional central government of Vietnam. He has had some success at winning support from abroad and from various groups in Vietnam, but his prospects are not bright. The terms of the French-Bao Dai agreement are less favorable to Vietnam than those won by Ho exactly two years before, except with respect to Vietnam's future foreign relations and unity. And not only do certain provisions constitute infringements on the sovereignty of the future state, but the agreement will lack the force of a treaty until it is ratified by the French National Assembly. Domestic French politics have been the chief cause of the vacillations and contradictions in France's handling of the Indochina problem. Neither the French Communist nor the French Socialist party has given more than verbal support to Ho's government, for both fear they may lose their following at home by advocating outright independence for Vietnam.

In Indochina, Vietnamese nationalism is the only strong force with which the French have to deal. Cambodian and Laotian nationalisms, though more widespread than before the war, are still embryonic and their leadership is divided and inexperi-



Bao Dai



Ho chi-Minh

enced. France has had no real difficulty in resuming control over these Buddhist and royalist peoples, although the form of control has now been outwardly modified. The Vietnam Republic, on the other hand, has been able not only to improve its military position but to maintain the coalition character of its government—accomplishments unequalled elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Its other claims to achieving democratic processes of government and economic improvements within the areas under its control are as yet impossible to appraise accurately.

All the evidence at hand indicates that the Republic, in so far as it is regarded as the best agent for achieving national independence and unity, enjoys the support of virtually all the politically conscious Vietnamese. But in so far as it is believed—very little at home but widely abroad—to be Communist, it is feared and opposed. Such fears naturally lend themselves to French propaganda, which in turn is naturally followed by Vietnamese denials, and the Communist victories in neighboring China make an easy or early solution of the question unlikely. Regardless of his ultimate goal, Ho would probably not make any alliance with the unpopular Chinese that would jeopardize the unity and support he has carefully built up in Vietnam by pursuing a nationalist and noncontroversial policy. Although differing views as to the structure of the Vietnamese state are now held by the various groups which compose the Republic's coalition government, these differences probably will remain in abeyance so long as the current anti-French struggle serves as a unifying force.

As yet there is no clear answer to the enigma: Does the Republic aim to be a democracy of the Western persuasion? Or will it try to appear so only until such time as it can safely gravitate into the Soviet orbit? Or will external pressures or internal disunity dictate the outcome?

5. Malaya: Rubber, Tin and Revolt

BEFORE THE WAR, MALAYA could be summed up, as one geographer stated, in three words—rubber, tin and Singapore. Rubber plantations covered 65 per cent of Malaya's cultivated land, producing 38 to 58 per cent of the world's supply in various years. In 1939, the mines yielded 56,000 tons of tin—almost a third of global output. And the £16-million naval base at Singapore was the central link in the British Empire's Far Eastern defense network, the strongest bastion of Western colonial power in Southeast Asia.

Today no one of these three factors is quite as important as it seemed in the pre-war era. The world managed to function without Malaya's rubber and tin during the Japanese occupation—indeed, synthetic rubber has become a commercial competitor to the natural product during the interim. Singapore's reputed invincibility has been proven false, and simultaneously colonialism itself has come under assault.

The assault on continued British rule in Malaya, however, differs from the independence movements in other Southeast Asian countries in certain important aspects. It is not the native Malays but the Chinese who are the most militant revolutionists in Malaya; furthermore the leaders of the revolt are Communists. The strife in Malaya is many-sided—a Chinese civil war superimposed on an already divided community which is just one corner of a distraught empire. The present and future of such a country is not simple.

Nor was its past simple. In pre-war Malaya there existed ten different administrations and seven customs barriers in an area

equivalent to Florida, inhabited by scarcely more than 5 million people. Historical circumstances, uneven economic development and the threefold division of the population—about 40 per cent Malay, another 40 per cent Chinese and 15 per cent Indian—largely accounted for these complexities.

For the practical purposes of administration the British divided the country into three units—the Straits Settlements, comprising the ports of Singapore, Penang and Malacca; the Federated Malay States of Selangor, Negri Sembilan, Pahang and Perak, embracing most of the main tin and rubber-producing areas; and the less centralized and less populous Unfederated Malay States of Johore, Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah and Perlis.

Malaya's evolution was shaped most strongly by economic forces, whether it was the busy trade and packed warehouses by which the Straits Settlements prospered or the mines and plantations which gave the inhabitants of the Federated Malay States the greatest per capita wealth of any group within the British Empire. Specifically it was the prosperity created by the successive tin and rubber booms that nullified the impetus towards any drastic change in Malaya's benevolent autocracy, whether on the part of the British, the Malays or the domiciled Chinese and Indians. Temporarily, during the two world wars and the depressions of the early 1920's and 1930's, the British government of Malaya forsook its *laissez-faire* tradition and established some controls over the local economy. But of these only a few export and import duties and the international controls over tin and rubber survived the emergency periods, almost wholly in the peninsular states, and Malaya remained a tax payers' paradise.

Conflict of Ruling Groups

Virtually the only political struggles known in pre-war Malaya were those involving the ruling groups—between the British vested interests and officials for a proportionately greater share of power and, to a much lesser extent, between the Federated

Malay States government at Kuala Lumpur and the sultans of the Unfederated Malay States, who resisted any further restriction of their sovereignty. Even the opposing pro-Malay and pro-Chinese factions were made up entirely of Britishers, who differed only in their conviction as to which group was the better instrument for perpetuating Malaya's prosperity under British rule.

Such disagreements took place over the heads of the country's Asian inhabitants, whose occupations were divided along ethnic lines and whose lives remained mutually aloof. The Malays' only concern was to safeguard their land and their social and religious traditions, while the Chinese and Indians—in so far as they had any political interests at all—were oriented towards their home countries. Alien Asians furnished Malaya's dynamic force, serving the country as laborers, middlemen, merchants and bankers. The British held almost all the highest positions, both in the government and in the heavily capitalized industries. The Malay aristocracy provided the officialdom for the Unfederated Malay States and, to a lesser extent, for the Federated Malay States, but the great majority of the indigenous people remained farmers and fishermen untouched by the country's rapid development and prosperity and refusing to produce more food than was required for their own needs.

Early in 1942 Japan by force of arms acquired control over this plural society, with its political apathy, its watertight social and economic divisions, its food deficit and its dependence on tin and rubber sales. No major political change resulted from the displacement of British officials by Japanese officers. In fact, Malaya was the only country in Southeast Asia which the Japanese treated frankly as a colony and to whose inhabitants they never promised even eventual independence. Japan did try to make Malaya economically self-sufficient and militarily a bastion, but with the same lack of success as had attended similar—but far less coercive—British efforts. The sultans accepted Japanese rule as passively as they had the British, though they were

treated with much less consideration for their dignity. The Indians were pressured into joining the military and labor battalions led by Subhas Chandra Bose, a renegade from the Indian Congress party who threw in his lot with the Axis. The Chinese, because of their wealth and their past support of the government of China, were actively persecuted and were blackmailed into "donating" huge sums for Japan's war effort. Inevitably it was the Chinese, supplemented by a few Indians and even fewer Malays, who organized a resistance movement of which the Malayan Communist party was the center, the Anti-Japanese Army the guerrilla force, and the Anti-Japanese Union the civilian organization. Late in the war this movement was supplied with arms and officers by the British, and the experience and weapons obtained in this period were used effectively, three years after the war ended, by this same organization against the British themselves.

Attempt to Restore Status Quo

The British Military Administration, which governed Malaya for six months after the Japanese surrender, simply restored pre-war legislation and tried to revive, with only lagging success, its tin and rubber economy. London had not anticipated the growth of political consciousness or the rift between the Chinese and Malay communities which the Japanese rule had effected and was only indifferently prepared to cope with the serious shortages in food and other essentials. Such planning for Malaya's future as had been done was confined to administrative simplification and centralization and to giving the Asian minorities limited political privileges. This involved the establishing of a Malayan Union, through the formal transfer of sovereignty from the sultans to the British crown, and the creating of a Malayan citizenship for those aliens who considered Malaya their "permanent home and object of their loyalty."

The need for a revamping of the administration was widely accepted, but the treaties made by the British in September-

October 1945, which deprived the sultans of their last remnants of sovereignty, aroused Malay opposition which, after a slow start, mounted in intensity. Nor did the proposed administrative separation of Singapore from the mainland—designed to preserve the Malay majority in the peninsular states from being swamped by predominantly Chinese Singapore—allay the Malays' fear of the Chinese. And this fear was sharpened by the prospective grant of citizenship rights to the minority groups. For their part, the Chinese merchants, although appreciating the political advantages they would gain from the union plan, were displeased by the economic implications of Singapore's separate status. In this they were at one with businessmen of all nationalities in the other Straits Settlements and in London.

The Indian community, consisting chiefly of illiterate coolies, was politically inert, having been chastened by its association with Bose's ill-starred venture. Urged by Pandit Nehru to resolve its dual loyalties in favor of either Malaya or India, it was far more attracted by nationality in an India about to become sovereign than by Malayan citizenship and its dubious benefits. Such opposition as the Indians showed to the government's policy took the form of strikes for higher wages to meet the spiralling cost of living. In this they followed in the wake of the Chinese, who were giving Malayan labor an increasingly radical leadership.

From Union to Federation

Opposition to the union plan became so intense and widespread that the British had to modify it. By December 1946 the union had been transformed into a federation, in which the sultans' fictional sovereignty was restored and the Malays' "special position" was safeguarded by requiring much stiffer qualifications for the acquisition of citizenship by non-Malays. But British control was modified only with respect to the limited representative bodies to be elected in Singapore and to the wider role in internal affairs played by a larger number of appointees

in the expanded federal and state councils of the federation. These changes were the outcome of secret negotiations conducted by the British exclusively with the sultans and with the United Malay National Organization (UMNO), composed of conservative, upper-class Malays, and they were subsequently opened to criticism from other groups and individuals.

The forces opposing the federation plan were divided by conflicting national or economic objectives. Two attempts to organize a united intra-communal front, based on the advocacy of a common Malayan nationality and of democratic rights for all the permanent residents of a self-governing Malaya, foundered for lack of widespread support (only once, in September 1947, did all the anti-federation forces come together to offer their own constitutional proposals). The first of those attempts was made by the Malayan Democratic Union, founded in December 1945, whose appeal and membership were largely confined to the local-born intelligentsia. The second, by the Pan-Malayan Council of Joint Action, was geared to a wider audience and to a more concrete program, but it never succeeded in speaking for any but the non-Malay domiciled communities—chiefly the Straits-born Chinese. Neither of these organizations attracted many Indian adherents, nor were they able to win over the more nationalistic and radical opponents of the federation scheme—the Malay Nationalist party and the Malayan Communist party. Leaders of both the Malayan Democratic Union and the Pan-Malayan Council of Joint Action faltered and withdrew as the struggle between the more extreme elements grew in violence.

The Malay Nationalist party, which voiced the opposition felt by the small middle-class Malay intelligentsia to the aristocratic conservatism of the UMNO, aimed at pan-Malay objectives, but it was handicapped by a record of Japanese collaborationism and by Sumatran leadership. Early in 1947, with the support of a few Malay groups, it organized the PUTERA (a "united Malay front") and tried—without success—to arouse widespread

nationalist opposition to the proposed federation. It claimed that the federation plan was pro-Malay only in appearance, and that the real interests of the indigenous people would be best served by close ties with the Indonesian Republic.

Communist Revolt

The Malayan Communist party, on the other hand, initially proposed a program broad enough to attract all the anti-imperialist forces in Malaya and to bridge over the national and economic cleavages between them. But it was never able to disguise effectively the revolutionary Marxism of its ultimate aims nor the predominantly Chinese texture of its leadership. Far from gaining new adherents, the Malayan Communist party progressively dissipated the goodwill it had earned from its war-time activities by the frequency with which it incited labor strikes and by the violence that marked its extortion of "protection money." Aside from the moot question of Soviet directives, the Communists evidently decided, because of dwindling popular support and ever-tightening British controls, to forsake their middle-of-the-road position and allies and to attempt to seize power by force.

The Communist revolt launched early in 1948 had two successive objectives. First, it aimed to coerce the conservative Chinese into supporting the uprising or, at least, to intimidate them into assuming a passive position. Secondly, it was directed against the British, who were believed to be militarily much weakened by their involvement with the current crises in Berlin, the Near East and China. Communist policy has been successful in so far as it has aimed at neutralizing the Chinese community and at costing the British heavily to carry on prolonged and indecisive guerrilla warfare. But the revolt was not sudden or strong enough either to oust the British government from Malaya or to curtail the country's tin and rubber production in 1948. Moreover, it has been marked by such savagery as to alienate many former fellow-travelers, who now feel con-

strained to choose between the forces of national conservatism and of economic revolution, for the struggle has cut across ethnic lines without obliterating them.

Although not a main target of the Communist attack, the Malays feel more hostile than before towards the Chinese and more loyal to the British, and such hopes as any of them had for a tie-up with the Indonesian Republic have grown dim. The Indians, with the exception of a few labor leaders, have stood mainly apart. Most directly affected of any of the Asian communities are the Chinese. The continued prosperity of their merchant class depends upon the maintenance in Malaya of orderly government, yet they are unavoidably and deeply affected by the terrorist methods of their Communist compatriots and by Communist victories in China. And the Chinese coolie class stands to lose by the discredit which Communist leadership has brought upon the whole organized labor movement.

In fact, the most serious consequence of the present crisis lies in the setback that Malaya has suffered in its progress towards self-governing institutions and social legislation. In the former respect, Britain's Labor government had taken a few, if halting, steps, and in the latter, outstanding advances had been made. Now the rifts between the three Asian communities have so widened as to be almost unbridgeable, and the British government of Malaya is financially unable to go ahead with its program of political and social reform. More important still, it is less inclined to do so.

The present struggle is being waged between the British and the radical fringe of the Chinese community, but subsequently China and Indonesia may dispute the control of Malaya.

6. Burma: Study in Political Fission

WHEN BURMA BECAME a sovereign nation on January 4, 1948, its future looked comparatively bright. Despite two devastating wartime campaigns—Burma, unlike the other Southeast Asian countries surveyed here, was a military battleground for the Japanese and the Allies—it was on the road to economic recovery. And with the aid of a united political front called the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), it had achieved independence without a conflict with its pre-war colonial ruler, Great Britain.

However, as the cohesion created by nationalist hostility to British rule was eliminated, Burma fell apart. Violence, political assassination and a bewildering number of factional quarrels took the stage as rival parties and ethnic groups struggled to oust the constitutional government. Within a year Burma had no less than four distinct revolts culminating in widespread civil war. During the first half of 1949 the beleaguered government actually controlled only the capital city of Rangoon, its treasury was empty and its shipments of rice and teak—of which Burma was once the world's leading exporter—were sadly reduced. More recently the government has made some progress toward restoring order, but it has a long way to go before independence brings material benefits to Burma's 17 million people.

This rapid disintegration may be traced to causes that arise out of Burma's history and geography. Isolated by almost impassable land frontiers from its three neighbors (China, India and Thailand), and situated away from the great shipping lanes

of the Far and Middle East, the Burmese developed a parochial outlook that was intensified, rather than offset, by the British colonial administration and by Burma's fate in the Pacific war. Burma's pre-war prosperity benefited almost exclusively the British and Indians who very largely controlled the country's economy and administration. Many of the Burmese farmers, who formed the great bulk of the indigenous population, fell so deeply into debt to moneylenders, mainly Indian, that ownership of much of Burma's richest rice land passed out of the hands of its cultivators. Moreover, the technically untrained Burmese intelligentsia found British and Indians barring their advancement to high governmental and commercial posts, and virtually the only fields left open to them were the law, journalism, and, above all, political agitation.

Pathway to Independence

Burmese nationalism became rapidly inflamed by this frustration. Ignorance of the world and of Burma's position in it caused the Burmese to regard foreigners as the root of all their evils and to believe that independence would automatically solve all their problems. Administrative separation from India in 1935 did not speed up Burma's advance towards self-government enough to make its leaders renounce the obstructionist tactics which they had developed towards the British government. As Japan's star rose in the Pacific, some Burmese nationalists looked to that country for aid. But when the sovereignty granted the Burmese by Japan on August 1, 1943, proved to be merely nominal and the exploitation of their country's great resources and manpower far exceeded anything they had experienced under British rule, the Burmese became more distrustful than ever before of "outside help" and more determined to win real independence through their own efforts—by force, if necessary.

Late in 1944, Aung San, one of the "Thirty Heroes" trained in Japan before the war, organized the AFPFL. Its leadership

consisted mainly of Communists and Socialists, and it cooperated with the Allied forces that reconquered Burma in the spring of 1945. But the British civilian government, which replaced the military administration in October 1945, refused to accede to the AFPFL's demand for a controlling position in the Executive Council and for the incorporation of its armed forces into the regular army. For more than a year the British tried vainly to govern Burma with a few of the docile Burmese who had accompanied them into wartime exile in India and to restore the economic structure by means of industrial project boards which favored British commerce more than they stimulated the country's productivity. During this period, Aung San built up the People's Volunteer Organization (PVO), a private army made up of fanatically devoted members of the former resistance forces, and he organized peasant revolts and labor strikes that grew in effectiveness.

By the summer of 1946, popular support had so obviously rallied behind the AFPFL that the British were faced with the alternatives of permitting it to govern Burma or of fighting a colonial war. Britain's Labor government chose the former course. It dispatched as governor to Burma Sir Hubert Rance, whose tact and sympathy won the confidence of Aung San, as well as his cooperation. And it invited AFPFL leaders to discuss Burma's future at a conference to be held in London. The ensuing agreement, signed in January 1947, announced as the common Anglo-Burmese objective "a free and independent Burma, whether within or without the British Empire." This basic agreement was confirmed by a treaty signed in October 1947, in which Burma pledged equitable compensation for British firms slated for nationalization and permitted Britain to retain certain military privileges in the country. Finally, actual power was turned over to a Burmese government on January 4, 1948.

Meanwhile, the Burmese splintering process had already started. Moreover, it had cost the life of Aung San, who was

shot down with six of his ministers in the provisional government on July 19, 1947, even before sovereignty passed to the new state.

Internal Dissension

Internal discord began as soon as Aung San showed his willingness to negotiate with the British. It took a number of different forms. One was a Right-wing plot which culminated in the assassination and then petered out. Added to this were four revolts, mainly among the Left-wing elements of the AFPFL, carried on sometimes simultaneously, sometimes in conjunction with one another, sometimes separately. Obviously, the effect of these rebellions has been to make Burma a highly confusing subject of study; obviously, also, the chaos of Burma has been tragic for the new nation and its people.

The rise and fall of Aung San's Right-wing opposition is perhaps the easiest to follow. Leaders of this group were veterans of pre-war political parties. They came mainly from the land-owning classes, had ties with the Buddhist clergy and had accepted office under the British or the Japanese or both. Among the more prominent in this category were U Saw, Ba Maw, Thakin Ba Sein and Thakin Tun Oke. ("U" and "Thakin" are Burmese terms of address which can be translated as "revered sir" and "master"; the Burmese have no family names.) Their opportunistic records contrasted with the patriotic integrity of Aung San, and their opposition to him derived less from ideological differences than from jealousy of his power. In any case, they refused to accept the London agreement and they boycotted the election held in April 1947 to form a constituent assembly. Later it became known that U Saw had instigated the assassination of Aung San and his colleagues, for which crime he was executed. These murders so discredited the Rightist opposition to the AFPFL that it became and has remained leaderless, leaving the major struggle for power in Burma to various Left-wing elements and ethnic minorities.

The Four Revolts

Much more complicated have been the splits and dissensions within the Left-wing elements. The Left-wing groups have differed not as to the ultimate aim of making Burma a socialized state but as to the timing, the method and, above all, the party by which the goal is to be achieved. Their conflicts have led to three revolts and contributed to a fourth. Roughly defined, these were:

1. A revolt of the Red Flag "Trotzkyite" Communists who broke away from the White Flag "Stalinist" Communists early in 1946 and who have been in opposition to the AFPFL and the government ever since.

2. A more serious break in Leftist unity which occurred late in 1946 when Aung San expelled the White Flag Communists from the AFPFL for lack of discipline. Worst of in three trials of strength with the AFPFL—a general strike in September 1948, the organization of rival peasant unions and the elections of April 1947—the White Flags vainly sought readmission to the AFPFL until the spring of 1948, when they broke into open revolt.

3. A split in Aung San's army, the People's Volunteer Organization, into the Yellow Band PVO and the White Band PVO, which became clear-cut in July 1948. This resulted from an attempt to form a Marxist League within the AFPFL, which would have involved the disarming and the political subordination of the PVO as a consequence of its merger with the Socialist party. It was the White Band PVO that revolted, although it has cooperated with the government several times since in opposing the insurgent Karens.

4. A Karen rebellion in August 1948. The Karens constitute an important ethnic group, numbering about one and one-half million and widely dispersed in southern and central Burma. Banking on their military prowess and misled by a few adventurers into expecting British support, these Karens demanded



Thakin Nu



Aung San

an independent and sovereign Karenistan rather than autonomy within the Union of Burma, as promised in the Burmese constitution. This demand is not supported by all the Karen community, but the rebellion—which brought about a great deal of fighting in 1949—is perhaps the most serious with which the government has had to deal. The Karens, of course, are not a Left-wing group, but their cause has sometimes been supported by the other dissident elements.

Efforts at Reconciliation

Both Aung San and his friend and successor, Thakin Nu, did their best to minimize the conflicts within the AFPFL and to heal the breaches once they occurred. Ironically, it has been under Nu, a poet, playwright and devout Buddhist who has made strenuous efforts to achieve unity, that the widest cleavages have occurred. Nu had persuaded Aung San against advocating Dominion status for Burma within the British Commonwealth on the ground that it would antagonize those who favored outright independence. After Aung San's assassination, he attempted to capitalize on the upsurge of Left-wing unity by

seeking rapprochement with the Communists. He renounced these efforts only after the Communists' persistent denunciation of the Anglo-Burmese treaty and their hoarding of arms convinced him that they were determined to overthrow his government by force. In February 1948 he patched up the split within the PVO—only to see it break out again a few months later.

To steal the Communists' thunder, as well as to reconcile those who felt that Burma's evolution towards socialism was not going far and fast enough, Nu sponsored a radical fifteen-point program in June 1948. This program was amplified in a two-year plan for economic development, launched prematurely for the same reason. But even this did not bring greater unity, for Nu refused to let the Communists share in shaping the program. The White Band PVO's insisted on including the Communists and wanted a greater share of the political power than that which Nu had allotted them.

Furthermore, Nu's proposals for nationalization of the land alienated the Burmese and Indian propertied classes. And his simultaneous taking over of the British-owned Irrawaddy Flotilla Company and teak concessions without making prior arrangements for compensation antagonized those very sources of capital most likely to aid in Burma's urgently needed rehabilitation.

The survival of Nu's government thus far in the face of such widespread attacks can be attributed only to the even greater disunity among its opponents and to Nu's personal prestige. Nu lacks the popular following enjoyed by Aung San, and he has been over-conciliatory towards "old friends" who have now become his enemies (oddly enough one of his accomplishments is a translation of Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* into Burmese). But he alone among the present leaders has the confidence of Burma's frontier peoples and elicits international respect. Nu's government is in dire need of foreign aid, particularly of a loan to finance the rice exports, but

if the conditions on which it is granted appear in any way to infringe on Burma's independence, he will lose even more internal support. The Western powers' desire for a non-Communist government in Burma and the continuing demand for rice are both so great that the Commonwealth governments have decided to grant a stabilizing loan, presumably on Burma's own terms.

Born as a conspiracy and organized to seize power by violence, the AFPFL unleashed forces which are now turned against it and which threaten to destroy the government as well. The greatest service which Nu can render Burma and the world is to save a government that has been constitutionally established. Historically and temperamentally the Burmese are prone to settle personal and political quarrels by force and to resent actively the authority of any central government. But there are signs that they are learning that disunity and the placing of personal and party interests above national ones can be a more serious danger to Burma's cherished independence than the foreign interference which they continue to dread above all else.

7. Southeast Asia's Future

BEHIND THE FERMENT in Southeast Asia today are the troubling forces of intense nationalism and inflationary living costs—both of which arose out of the region's colonial past and were intensified by the Japanese occupation and its aftermath. Political and economic independence and unity are the universal goals of all Southeast Asian peoples, and whatever nationalist government or party appears likely to attain them enjoys popular support. But when the unifying element supplied by an independence struggle is eliminated, or when the group in power falters in its leadership or becomes deeply involved in the world rivalry between the East and the West, then existing ideological divisions and ethnic differences are easily widened by interested factions, either inside the country or without.

Middle-of-the-road governments or parties in contemporary Southeast Asia are fighting for their existence against the growing strength of their Rightist and Leftist opponents. Violence has come to play an ominously large role in the region. Japan's conquest and occupation and the post-war independence struggles have provided the opportunities and also the weapons for individuals to commit profitable crimes or to seize political power, or both. Further complications arise out of the many large Asian minorities in Southeast Asia. Their factional strife, reflecting that of China and India, and their privileged, often parasitic economic position make them disliked by the indigenous people and feared as potential fifth-columnists.

Below these shifting alignments and contending forces lives the common man of Southeast Asia—the politically unawakened

and illiterate farmers and fishermen who form 90 per cent of the region's population. For them no new era has yet dawned. In fact, they are worse off as a result of the damage done to their countries' economic systems during the war. Their lives and property are increasingly insecure, owing to the strife now raging in all the countries except Thailand. Thus far they have benefited virtually not at all from the many reforms and projects launched in their name by Southeast Asia's governments—colonial and national alike.

Inevitably Southeast Asia's strategic position, production and potentialities are of increasing concern to the world. The Soviet bloc has supported the nationalist struggles, at least verbally, and has naturally won friends for itself among subject peoples. The colonial powers have been deeply involved in warfare that has failed to suppress the nationalist movements and that has cost them dear in terms of military casualties and lost production. The Western powers want two things of Southeast Asia: its rice surplus to avert famine in other areas within their sphere of influence and the stability of its governments as a defense against Communist forces both inside the countries and in neighboring China and India.

For their part, the Southeast Asians would like to enlist foreign support for their independence struggles and for the rebuilding of their economies. But past experience has led them to fear that such support may undermine their hard-won sovereignty or involve them in a world conflict. Mutual ignorance, indifference and suspicion have so far prevented the development of a strong regional organization. Neither the Southeast Asia League promoted by Nehru and Aung San in 1947 nor the Southeast Asian Union proposed in 1949 by President Quirino of the Philippines met with an enthusiastic response from its potential members. So long as international events permit, each Southeast Asian country will probably keep on trying to follow a noncommittal course.

U. S. Policy In Southeast Asia

by Blair Bolles

THE SHADOW OF THE United States lay over the Knights' Hall in The Hague in November 1949, when Willem Drees, Prime Minister of the Netherlands, and Mohammed Hatta, Prime Minister of the Republic of Indonesia, signed the statute creating the Netherlands Indonesian Union. By the scratches of his pen Herr Drees at last acknowledged Dutch surrender to the East Indian nationalists' demand for sovereign freedom and to the American government's demand that the Dutch heed the East Indians. Although Americans fired never a shot in the spice islands after Japan gave up the fight in World War II, the intervention of Washington, manifested through the United Nations as slowly but as inexorably as pressure from a glacier, was probably almost as telling as had been French intervention on behalf of American independence during the Revolutionary War.

Assisting in the liberation of Indonesia from its historic colonial association with a Western nation was the first decisive action the United States took in Southeast Asian affairs after carrying out, three years earlier, its agreement to free the Philippines so that those islands could form a republic of their own. In that part of the world Washington seems to practice "bleachers" diplomacy, as a non-participating spectator of events. Maintenance of this attitude has given the United States the appearance of whimsically favoring both revolution and the *status quo* in Southeast Asia. Actually, the United States is con-

sistent, though perhaps lethargic, in its policy there, even though the present tendency of the State Department is to form separate policies for each of the nations that make up the southern and eastern portions of Asia and the adjacent archipelagoes.

The paramount concern of the Truman Administration in the Far East is to encourage settlement of the internal conflicts that harass the Southeast Asian countries by methods which will frustrate advocates of communism. The State Department assumes that economic recovery and development in most Asian countries has been, and may for some time be, impeded by continuing unrest and armed rebellion. When measured by the concern for frustrating communism, State Department attitudes make an organic pattern. The United States actively supported the most energetic nationalists of Indonesia against the Dutch because it thought the triumph of those nationalists in their struggle for liberty would weaken communism. At the same time it supports France against the insurgency of the most energetic nationalists of Indochina because it thinks the triumph of those nationalists would strengthen communism. Their bearded leader, Ho chi-Minh, is believed to be a Communist loyal to the Soviet Union.

No Extensive Commitments

In parts of Asia the interest of the Administration in halting internal conflicts sometimes outweighs ideological considerations. It has viewed the growing influence of the Communists in Korea and China, for example, without marked alarm. Washington decided last spring to withdraw its troops from South Korea, despite the strength of the Communist government in North Korea and the opinion of the United Nations Korean Commission that the presence of American troops was vital to realization of hopes for unification of the country. The State Department's publication of its White Paper on China last July ended the policy of helping the recognized Chinese government to resist the advance of the Chinese Communist armies. But in

Southeast Asia the United States has tried to devise policies that would stop the Communists, without, however, involving itself extensively in affairs of that area.

The United States has taken no initiative in its policy of halting communism except in Indonesia. When U E Maung, Foreign Minister of Burma, visited Washington last summer, Secretary of State Dean Acheson gave him a warm official greeting which meant that the independent Burmese government headed by Prime Minister Thakin Nu, whom U E Maung was serving, had the full moral support of the United States in its struggle to put down the Communist and Karen rebels. But the United States did not underline this sentiment with gifts or loans by which Burma could increase its armaments.

Similarly, the United States accepts the London point of view that it is proper British policy to send troops against the Communist rebels in Malaya. But the United States has given Britain no direct help in that campaign, beyond agreeing last September to encourage American use of more natural rubber and to review its stockpiling program for rubber and tin. Malaya in 1948 produced 47 per cent of the world's natural rubber, and the United States bought 38 per cent of the Malayan crop. Malaya during the same year produced 38 per cent of the world's tin, most of it going to the United States.

Support for Independence

Once the outstanding issue in Asia for the United States was the struggle between imperialists and those seeking independence. But the readiness of indigenous governments—like Burma's—and imperial powers—like Britain in Malaya—both to take the field against Communists unsettles American opposition to imperialism, at least as long as the immediate goal of the United States in Southeast Asia is to check communism.

Verbally the American government encourages the development of self-government where it can. The State Department, for example, in approving resumption by Bao Dai of the em-

peror's throne in Indochina, announced that he was "making sincere efforts to unite all truly nationalist elements within Vietnam" with some prospect of forming "the basis for the progressive realization of the legitimate aspirations of the Vietnamese people." Such ambiguous phrases, of course, do not commit the United States to follow in Indochina or elsewhere the policy of liberation which it pursued toward the Philippines and Indonesia.

The United States has manifested its traditional distaste for imperialism by helping already independent nations in Southeast Asia to keep their full freedom. After World War II Britain presented Siam with demands which would have subjected the latter to British military and economic domination. The United States, however, persuaded the British government to modify those demands, although Thailand thought the United States could have done more for it. On the other hand, the Thai government which Marshal Pibul Songgram established early in 1948 has been beset by violence, some of it probably Communist-inspired, but the State Department has let the Pibul regime struggle through its troubles without American help, in keeping with the passiveness which characterizes American attitudes toward Southeast Asia.

To show the Filipinos that liberation is complete, President Truman announced during the 1949 Philippine presidential election campaign that the United States would remain friendly to the islands no matter who won the highest office there. Followers of President Elpidio Quirino, seeking reelection, had said that Americans would never help the Philippines if Jose P. Laurel, wartime Japanese puppet president in Manila, defeated Quirino. Some American Congressmen visiting the islands had encouraged the spread of this opinion by stating that Washington should withhold military grants from the Philippines until after the election. The victory of Quirino saved Mr. Truman from controversy with the Congressmen.

American citizens and British, Chinese, Siamese and Filipino

officials have suggested that the United States invigorate its anti-Communist policy in Southeast Asia by spending large sums there and encouraging the formation of an alliance in the area. Excluding \$100 million which the Economic Cooperation Administration (Marshall Plan) has set aside for Indonesia and reconstruction appropriations for the Philippines, the United States has made no money grants to Southeast Asia, and Secretary of State Acheson announced last spring that America opposed a Pacific alliance at that time.

When he took office last January, Mr. Acheson accepted the assumption of his predecessor, George C. Marshall, that the diplomatic conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union had to be settled in Europe. The corollary of this opinion was that concentration on Asian affairs could weaken us in the European struggle. An economy-minded Congress might balance funds spent in Southeast Asia by reducing funds earmarked for Europe. But Mr. Acheson decided in the fall of 1949 to send his ambassador-at-large, Dr. Philip Jessup, to Asia. That meant he wanted fresh advice about the degree to which the United States should take part in Southeast Asian affairs.

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